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The Road to War in Ukraine — The History of NATO and US Military Exercises With Ukraine — Part 2

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23–30 minutes

U.S. Marines with Kilo Company, Battalion Landing Team 3/5, 11th Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU), patrol in formation during immediate action drills aboard the amphibious assault ship USS Boxer (LHD 4).

The decade of 2000 marked the start of Ukraine becoming a de facto member of NATO. It not only participated in all of the main exercises, but it hosted many. In fact, between 2000 and 2010, Ukraine is ranked in the top six of countries that hosted a NATO or USEUCOM exercise. Ukraine and Georgia, who was ranked number seven, were not NATO members. What the hell? Two non-NATO countries hosted more NATO exercises than 22 of the member nations. This is prima facie evidence that the West, despite warnings from Russia, was intent on making Ukraine and Georgia official members of NATO.

Only two things distinguished Ukraine from NATO members — it did not have a financial obligation to contribute to NATO and it was not covered by Article 5. Other than that, Ukraine was operating as a de facto member of NATO by 2010.

Project Ukraine was not confined to military cooperation alone. US and UK intelligence organizations were actively involved in Ukraine and were coordinating operations and activities with both NATO and EUCOM. The CIA, for example, has intelligence officers assigned to NATO and USEUCOM headquarters. There job is to brief senior leaders on CIA operations and coordinate activities to ensure no wires get crossed. With the benefit of hindsight, it is now clear that during the period between 2000 and 2010, the US government, with collaboration from the UK, was working intently to split Ukraine away from Russia's sphere of influence and capture it for the West.

Note: My chats with Nima and Judge Napolitano are posted at the end of this article.

2000

Cooperative Partner 2000:

The principal NATO-led military exercise conducted with Ukraine in 2000 was Exercise Cooperative Partner 2000. This exercise took place from 19 June to 1 July 2000 in the Black Sea and the area around Odessa, Ukraine. The exercise involved forces from NATO's Standing Naval Force Mediterranean (STANAVFORMED) and the Standing Mine Counter-Measures Force Mediterranean (MCMFORMED), along with participants from ten NATO countries and six partner nations. Russia attended as an observer. The main objective was to train multinational forces to work together for peace support operations, enhancing interoperability and cooperation between NATO and partner countries.

Peace Shield 2000 (May–June 2000)

- **Type:** Command Post Exercise (CPX) + Field Training
- **Participants:**

- **Ukraine** (primary host)
- **NATO/PfP:** U.S., UK, Germany, Poland, Canada, and others.
- **Observed by:** Russia (under PfP, despite tensions over NATO-Ukraine cooperation).
- **Objectives:**
- Train for **multinational peacekeeping operations** (e.g., Kosovo-style scenarios).
- Improve **C4I (Command, Control, Communications, Computers, and Intelligence)** interoperability.
- Test Ukraine's ability to integrate with NATO-standard procedures.
- **Notable Elements:**

Cooperative Determination 2000 (September 2000)

- **Type:** Maritime/Search-and-Rescue (SAR) Exercise
- **Location:** Odessa and Black Sea waters
- **Participants:**
- **Naval forces:** Ukraine, U.S. (USS *Yorktown*), Turkey, Romania, Bulgaria, Georgia.
- **USEUCOM** provided P-3 Orion surveillance aircraft.
- **Objectives:**
- Counter-piracy, SAR, and **maritime interdiction operations**.
- First major Black Sea exercise with Ukraine post-Cold War.
- **Political Context:**Russia criticized the exercise as "NATO expansionism" but participated as an observer.
- Demonstrated Ukraine's push for **Black Sea security partnerships** amid rising regional tensions.

Cossack Steppe 2000 (Summer 2000)

- **Type:** Bilateral Field Training Exercise (FTX)

- **Location:** Desna Training Center (Chernihiv Oblast) & other sites
- **Participants:** Ukrainian Army + **U.S. Army Europe (USAREUR)** advisors.
- **Focus:**
- Peacekeeping tactics (e.g., convoy security, checkpoint operations).
- Medical evacuation (MEDEVAC) and combat engineer drills.
- **Legacy:**
- Part of the **U.S.-Ukraine Joint Contact Team Program (JCTP)**, launched in 1994 to aid Ukraine's military reform.
- Paved the way for future exercises like **Rapid Trident** (post-2006).

  In 2000, the United States European Command (USEUCOM) executed its first Military Contact Plan with Ukraine, following the transfer of responsibility for U.S. military engagement in Ukraine from the Joint Staff to EUCOM in late 1998. The 2000 plan was developed collaboratively with the Ukrainian Ministry of Defense and included a variety of military-to-military events, such as planning meetings, medical, legal, and chaplain exchanges, and other cooperative activities. These events were designed to align with specific objectives and priorities identified by both sides.

2001

Cossack Express 2001 (April–May 2001)

- **Location:** Ukraine (multiple sites)
- **Participants:** Ukrainian forces, U.S. Army Europe (USAREUR), and NATO advisors.
- **Focus:** Logistics, medical training, and crisis response.
- **Significance:** Aimed at improving Ukraine's ability to support international peacekeeping missions.

Sea Breeze 2001 (July 16–27, 2001)

- **Location:** Black Sea (near Odessa and Crimea, Ukraine)
- **Participants:** Ukraine, U.S. (USEUCOM/NATO), and other NATO partners.

- **Focus:** Maritime security, search and rescue (SAR), anti-submarine warfare (ASW), and amphibious operations.
- **Significance:** Part of the annual **“Sea Breeze”** series (started in 1997), enhancing interoperability between Ukraine and NATO.

Cooperative Determination 2001 (September 2001)

- **Location:** Yavoriv Training Area, Ukraine (near Lviv)
- **Participants:** Ukraine, U.S. (USEUCOM), and NATO allies.
- **Focus:** Peacekeeping operations (PKO), command post exercises (CPX), and joint maneuvers.
- **Significance:** Part of the **Partnership for Peace (PfP)** program, improving Ukraine’s readiness for multinational operations.

Clear Sky 2001 (October 2001)

- **Location:** Starokostiantyniv Air Base, Ukraine
- **Participants:** Ukrainian Air Force, U.S. Air Force (USAFE), and NATO partners.
- **Focus:** Air defense, search and rescue (SAR), and airspace coordination.
- **Significance:** Strengthened Ukraine’s air force interoperability with NATO standards.

2002

Cossack Express 2002″ (March–April 2002)

- **Location:** Ukraine (multiple regions)
- **Participants:** Ukrainian National Guard, U.S. National Guard (State Partnership Program), and other NATO advisors.
- **Focus:** Disaster response, counter-terrorism, and crisis management.
- **Significance:** Strengthened civil-military cooperation and emergency response coordination.

Cooperative Partner 2002″ (June 2002)

- **Location:** Yavoriv Training Area (Lviv region, Ukraine)
- **Participants:** Ukraine, U.S. (USEUCOM), NATO members (including Poland, Germany, Canada), and Partnership for Peace (PfP) countries.
- **Focus:** Peacekeeping operations (PKO), command-post exercises (CPX), joint staff coordination.
- **Significance:** Part of NATO's **Partnership for Peace (PfP)** program, aimed at preparing Ukrainian forces for potential NATO-led peacekeeping missions.

Sea Breeze 2002 (July–August 2002)

- **Location:** Black Sea (near Odesa and Mykolaiv, Ukraine)
- **Participants:** Ukraine, U.S. (USEUCOM/NATO), and other NATO allies (including Turkey, UK, Greece, etc.)
- **Focus:** Maritime security, amphibious operations, search and rescue (SAR), anti-submarine warfare (ASW).
- **Significance:** Part of the annual **"Sea Breeze"** series (ongoing since 1997), enhancing interoperability between Ukraine and NATO naval forces.

Other Engagements:

- Ukraine also participated in **NATO/PfP exercises** such as **"Cooperative Key"** (a command-post exercise) and **"Cooperative Nugget"**, focusing on interoperability in peace support operations.

2003

In 2003, Ukraine participated in several notable military exercises with **NATO** and **U.S. European Command (USEUCOM)**, reflecting its growing partnership with the Alliance and Western militaries. Some key exercises included:

Cooperative Archer 2003 (June 2003 – Lithuania)

- A **NATO Partnership for Peace (PfP)** exercise focused on **peacekeeping operations**.
- Involved Ukrainian troops training alongside NATO forces in command post and field exercises.
- Aimed at enhancing interoperability between NATO and partner nations.

Sea Breeze 2003 (July 2003 – Black Sea, Ukraine)

- A **U.S.-Ukraine co-led** maritime exercise under the **Partnership for Peace** program.
- Focused on **naval interoperability, search and rescue (SAR), and anti-submarine warfare (ASW)**.
- Participating nations included the U.S. (USEUCOM), Ukraine, NATO allies, and other partners.

Cossack Express 2003 (September 2003 – Ukraine)

- A **command post exercise (CPX)** involving Ukrainian forces and NATO/PfP partners.
- Focused on **crisis response and peace support operations**.
- Part of Ukraine's efforts to align its military doctrines with NATO standards.

Combined Endeavor 2003 (September-October 2003 – Germany)

- A **large-scale communications and interoperability exercise** led by USEUCOM.
- Ukrainian forces participated alongside NATO and partner nations to improve **military data-sharing and command systems**.

Clear Sky 2003 (October 2003 – Ukraine)

- A **joint air defense exercise** involving Ukrainian, U.S., and other NATO/PfP forces.
- Focused on **airspace coordination and air-missile defense cooperation**.

In March 2003, Ukraine finalized its 2003 Target Plan within the NATO-Ukraine Action Plan framework. This plan provided for intensified military cooperation, consultations, and preparation for large-scale military exercises, including international ones. These activities were part of a broader effort to align Ukraine's military standards and procedures with those of NATO, as well as to test military equipment and armaments in a multinational context.

2004

In 2004, Ukraine participated in several significant military exercises with **NATO** and **U.S. European Command (USEUCOM)**, reflecting its growing partnership with the Alliance and Western militaries following the **2002 NATO-Ukraine Action Plan**. Key exercises included:

Cossack Express 2004 (Spring 2004)

- **Location:** Yavoriv Training Area, Lviv Oblast (Western Ukraine)
- **Participants:** Ukraine, U.S. Army Europe (USEUCOM), and NATO partners.
- **Ukrainian Participants: 24th Mechanized Brigade** (Yavoriv) – Trained with U.S. Army Europe's **1st Infantry Division** on peacekeeping logistics.
- **National Guard Units** – Drilled on crowd control (later relevant during the Orange Revolution protests).
- **NATO Link:** The Yavoriv Training Area later became the **Combat Training Center for NATO partners** (2015 onward).
- **Focus:** Peacekeeping drills, command post exercises (CPX), and logistical coordination.
- **Significance:** Aimed at preparing Ukrainian troops for potential contributions to NATO-led missions (e.g., Kosovo or Iraq).

Rapid Answer 2004 (June 2004)

- **Location:** Poland and Ukraine (joint border areas)

- **Participants:** Ukraine, Poland (a newly NATO-acceded member), and other Allied forces.
- **Focus:** Rapid deployment, crisis response, and interoperability with NATO forces.
- **Significance:** Demonstrated Ukraine's role in regional security alongside NATO's eastern flank.

Sea Breeze 2004 (July–August 2004)

- **Location:** Black Sea (Odessa and Crimea regions)
- **Participants:** Ukraine, U.S. Navy (USEUCOM), NATO allies (including Turkey, UK, France), and partner nations.
- **Focus:** Maritime security, anti-terrorism, search-and-rescue (SAR), and naval interoperability.
- **Significance:** Part of the annual **"Sea Breeze" series** (ongoing since 1997), enhancing Black Sea regional security cooperation.

Cooperative Determination 2004 (August 2004)

- **Location:** Crimea, Ukraine (Feodosia training area)
- **Participants:** Ukrainian Armed Forces, NATO members (including the U.S., UK, Germany, Poland, and others)
- **Focus:** Peacekeeping operations, interoperability with NATO standards.
- **Significance:** Part of the **Partnership for Peace (PfP)** program, emphasizing joint command structures and crisis response.

Political Fallout & Long-Term Impact

- **Russian Reaction:**
- Moscow accused NATO of "encroachment" and pressured Ukraine to join the **Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO)** instead.
- **Domestic Divide:**
- Pro-Western factions (e.g., Viktor Yushchenko's bloc) praised the drills, while pro-Russian groups (Viktor Yanukovych's Party of Regions) opposed

them.

- **2008 NATO Summit:**
- Ukraine's 2004 exercises built momentum for its eventual **Membership Action Plan (MAP)** bid, though blocked by German/French hesitancy.

2005

Throughout 2005, NATO and Ukraine developed practical projects aimed at addressing Ukraine's national security and defense needs. These included the launch of PfP trust funds to assist with the destruction of excess munitions and the retraining and resettlement of redundant military personnel . Additionally, there was the launch of a project to assist with the training of civilian personnel for Ukraine's security and defense structures.

Cooperative Archer 2005 (June 2005)

- **Location:** Tbilisi, Georgia (but involved Ukrainian troops).
- **Participants:** Ukraine, Georgia, NATO members, and PfP nations.
- **Focus:** Crisis response, peacekeeping, and NATO interoperability (Ukraine contributed troops as part of PfP engagement).

Rapid Trident 2005 (July 9–22, 2005)

- **Location:** Yavoriv Training Area, Lviv region, Ukraine.
- **Participants:** Ukraine, U.S. (USEUCOM-led), NATO members, and PfP countries.
- **Focus:** Peace support operations, joint command post training, and enhancing interoperability with NATO standards.
- **Significance:** Part of the **Partnership for Peace (PfP)** program, helping Ukraine align with NATO procedures.

Sea Breeze 2005 (July 18–29, 2005)

- **Location:** Black Sea (near Odessa) and Mykolaiv regions, Ukraine.
- **Participants:** Ukraine, U.S. (USEUCOM/NATO), NATO allies (including

Turkey, UK, France, etc.), and Partnership for Peace (PfP) countries.

- **Focus:** Maritime security, amphibious operations, and interoperability between NATO and Ukrainian forces.
- **Details:** Involved naval, air, and ground forces, with a focus on counterterrorism and peacekeeping scenarios.

Cossack Steppe 2005 (September 2005)

- **Location:** Ukraine (multiple training areas).
- **Participants:** Ukraine, U.S., and other NATO/PfP partners.
- **Focus:** Command and staff training, peacekeeping operations, and logistical coordination.

The first Rapid Trident exercise in Ukraine took place in 2005 at the Yavoriv training ground as part of the Partnership for Peace program, marking the beginning of this recurring multinational exercise.

2006

These exercises were part of Ukraine's broader push for **NATO integration** following the **Orange Revolution (2004)**.

Cooperative Archer 2006 (June 2006)

- **Location:** Tbilisi, Georgia (but involved Ukrainian troops)
- **Participants:** NATO members, Ukraine, Georgia, and other PfP nations.
- **Focus:** Command post exercise (CPX) simulating NATO-led crisis response operations.
- **Details:** Aimed at improving Ukraine's compatibility with NATO standards in crisis management.

Sea Breeze 2006 (July 17–28, 2006)

- **Location:** Black Sea (near Odessa and Crimea, Ukraine)
- **Participants:** Ukraine (host), U.S. (USEUCOM/NATO), NATO allies

(including Turkey, UK, France, Germany, etc.), and Partnership for Peace (PfP) nations.

- **Focus:** Maritime security, anti-terrorism, search and rescue (SAR), and interoperability between NATO and Ukrainian forces.
- **Details:** Involved naval maneuvers, amphibious operations, and air defense drills.

Rapid Trident 2006 (July 17–28, 2006)

- **Location:** Yavoriv Training Area, Lviv Oblast, Ukraine
- **Participants:** Ukraine, U.S. (USEUCOM-led), NATO members, and Partnership for Peace countries.
- **Focus:** Ground force interoperability, peacekeeping operations, and joint command procedures.
- **Details:** Part of the U.S.-led **Joint Multinational Training Group-Ukraine (JMTG-U)** initiative to enhance Ukrainian military readiness.

Cossack Steppe 2006 (September 2006)

- **Location:** Southern Ukraine
- **Participants:** Ukraine, U.S., and other NATO partners.
- **Focus:** Peacekeeping and stability operations training.

2007

In 2007, NATO and Ukraine conducted a notable command post exercise in Sevastopol and maintained a structured program of military cooperation under the NATO-Ukraine Military Work Plan and Annual Target Plan. The chiefs of defence from NATO and Ukraine met in May 2007 to assess progress under the NATO-Ukraine Military Work Plan for that year. They tasked their military representatives to begin preparations for the next cycle of cooperation, indicating ongoing planning and execution of joint activities. The NATO-Ukraine Annual Target Plan (ATP) for 2007outlined practical steps for cooperation in political, military, and security spheres, including

exercises and advisory activities to improve Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic integration . While the ATP itself is a planning document, it confirms that military exercises and collaborative activities were a significant part of the 2007 agenda.

Cooperative Archer 2007 (May 9–18, 2007)

- **Location:** Tbilisi, Georgia (but involved Ukrainian forces)
- **Participants:** Ukraine, NATO members, and PfP partners.
- **Focus:** Command post exercise (CPX) simulating NATO-led crisis response operations.
- **Note:** Though held in Georgia, Ukrainian troops participated as part of NATO interoperability training.

Cossack Steppe 2007 (June 2007)

- **Location:** Ukraine
- **Participants:** Ukraine with NATO advisors (including U.S. personnel)
- **Focus:** Peacekeeping and stability operations training.

Sea Breeze 2007 (July 16–27, 2007)

- **Location:** Black Sea (near Odessa and Mykolaiv, Ukraine)
- **Participants:** Ukraine, U.S. (USEUCOM), NATO allies (including Turkey, Greece, Canada, and others)
- **Focus:** Maritime security, anti-submarine warfare, search and rescue, and interdiction operations.
- **Significance:** Part of the annual U.S.-Ukraine co-hosted exercise series under the **Partnership for Peace (PfP)** program.

Rapid Trident 2007 (September 17–28, 2007)

- **Location:** Yavoriv Training Area, Lviv Oblast, Ukraine
- **Participants:** Ukraine, U.S. (USEUCOM), NATO members, and

Partnership for Peace (PfP) countries.

- **Focus:** Peacekeeping operations, interoperability, and joint command post training.
- **Significance:** Part of the U.S.-led **Joint Multinational Training Group-Ukraine (JMTG-U)** initiative.

2008

The NATO-Ukraine Annual Target Plan for 2008 formalized cooperation, including joint exercises, training, and seminars . Ukraine's participation in multinational exercises was part of its broader Euro-Atlantic integration efforts, as reaffirmed at the 2008 NATO Bucharest Summit . While *Sea Breeze* and *Immediate Response* were the most prominent multinational exercises involving Ukraine in 2008, other smaller joint training events and seminars were also conducted under the NATO-Ukraine partnership framework.

These exercises occurred amid Ukraine's push for a **NATO Membership Action Plan (MAP)** at the April 2008 Bucharest Summit. While NATO declined to grant MAP due to opposition from some members (e.g., Germany and France), it affirmed Ukraine's future membership prospects, stating it *"will become a member of NATO"* eventually. Russia strongly opposed these developments, escalating tensions that later influenced its 2014 annexation of Crimea.

Rapid Trident 2008

- **Date:** June 2008
- **Location:** Yavoriv Training Area, Ukraine (near Lviv)
- **Participants:** Ukrainian Armed Forces, U.S. Army Europe (USEUCOM), NATO member & partner nations.
- **Focus:** Interoperability, peacekeeping operations, and joint command procedures.
- **Significance:** Part of the **Partnership for Peace (PfP)** program, enhancing Ukraine's ability to work with NATO forces.

Sea Breeze 2008

- **Date:** July 2008
- **Location:** Black Sea (Odessa region) & Southern Ukraine
- **Participants:** Ukraine, U.S. (USEUCOM/NATO), and other allied navies.
- **Focus:** Maritime security, anti-terrorism, and disaster response drills.
- **Context:** Annual U.S.-Ukraine naval exercise demonstrating NATO-Ukraine cooperation in the Black Sea.

Combined Endeavor 2008

- **Date:** September 2008
- **Location:** Grafenwöhr, Germany (communications-focused exercise)
- **Participants:** Ukraine joined NATO and partner nations.
- **Focus:** Improving military communications interoperability with NATO standards.

2009

The exercises in 2009 were central to strengthening Ukraine's military cooperation with NATO and the U.S., laying the groundwork for deeper defense ties in subsequent years These exercises were part of Ukraine's **NATO Partnership for Peace (PfP)** program, which sought closer military cooperation without full membership. Russia strongly criticized these drills, particularly **Sea Breeze**, as encroaching on its sphere of influence. The training laid groundwork for future cooperation, especially after Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea, when Ukraine intensified NATO-linked exercises.

These exercises also were part of the broader NATO-Ukraine cooperation, as outlined in the NATO-Ukraine Annual Target Plan for 2009, which emphasized joint training, equipment modernization, and increasing interoperability . USEUCOM (United States European Command) regularly supported and participated in these exercises, underscoring the U.S. commitment to European security and partnership with Ukraine.

Sea Breeze 2009

- **Date:** July 2009
- **Location:** Black Sea (near Odessa and Crimea)
- **Participants:** Ukraine, U.S. (USEUCOM), NATO allies (including Turkey, Greece, Canada), and partner nations.
- **Focus:** Maritime security, anti-piracy, amphibious operations, and interoperability between NATO and Ukrainian forces.
- **Details:** Involved naval ships, aircraft, and special operations forces. Russia opposed the exercise, viewing it as NATO expansionism near its borders.

Rapid Trident 2009

- **Date:** September 2009
- **Location:** Yavoriv Training Center (near Lviv, Ukraine)
- **Participants:** Ukraine, U.S. Army Europe (USEUCOM), NATO members (including Poland, Germany), and Partnership for Peace (PfP) countries.
- **Focus:** Peacekeeping operations, counterinsurgency, and joint command post training.
- **Details:** Part of the U.S.-led **Joint Multinational Training Group-Ukraine (JMTG-U)** initiative to enhance Ukrainian military interoperability with NATO.

Saber Guardian 2009″ (Part of the “Combined Endeavor” series)

- **Date:** Conducted periodically (Ukraine participated in related interoperability drills)
- **Focus:** Communications interoperability between NATO and partner nations.
- **Details:** Aimed at improving secure data-sharing and command structures.

2010

2010 was part of Ukraine's **pro-NATO phase** under President **Viktor Yanukovych**, who initially continued military cooperation, despite later rejecting NATO membership (2010–2014). The Ukrainian Cabinet of Ministers approved an action plan in June 2010 for annual cooperation with NATO, which included participation in NATO-led peacekeeping missions, joint exercises, and training of Ukrainian troops within NATO structures. Ukraine participated in NATO's *Operation Active Endeavour*, a counter-terrorist maritime surveillance operation in the Mediterranean Sea. Ukraine deployed ships to support this operation six times between 2007 and 2010, including in 2010. The **State Partnership Program (SPP)** between Ukraine and the **U.S. National Guard (California)** continued, including joint training events.

Rapid Trident 2010

- **Date:** July 2010
- **Location:** Yavoriv Training Area, Lviv Oblast, Ukraine
- **Participants:** Ukraine, NATO members (including the U.S.), and Partnership for Peace (PfP) countries.
- **Focus:** Joint multinational peacekeeping operations, interoperability with NATO forces.
- **Significance:** Part of the annual U.S.-Ukraine cooperative military training program under the **Joint Multinational Training Group-Ukraine (JMTG-U)**.

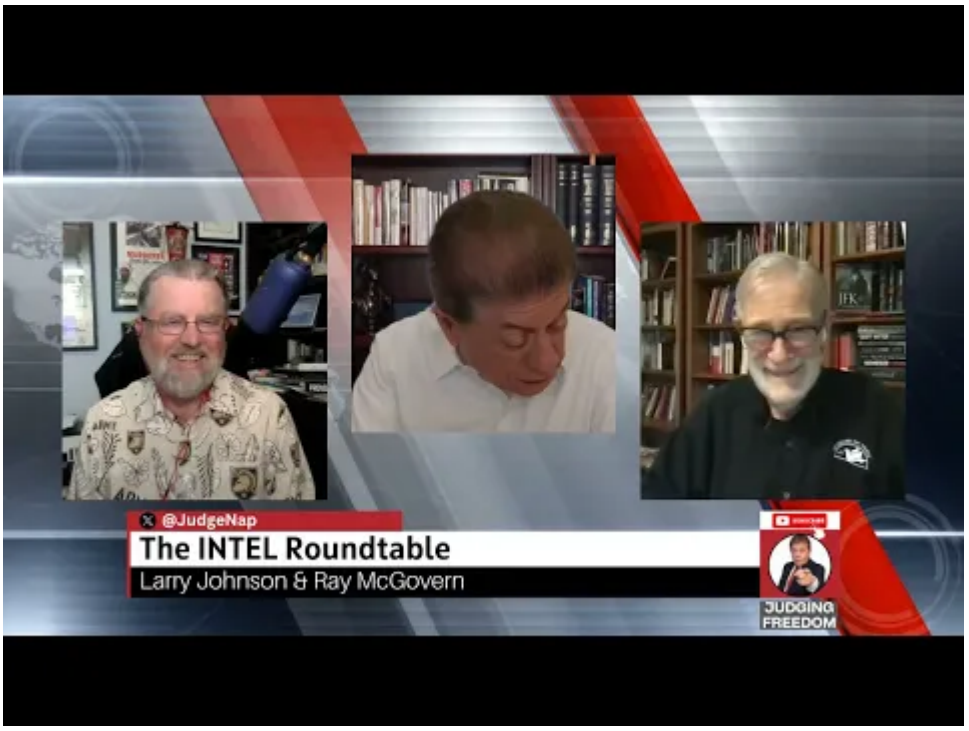
Sea Breeze 2010

- **Date:** July 2010
- **Location:** Black Sea (near Odessa)
- **Participants:** Ukraine, U.S. (USEUCOM/NATO), and other allied nations.
- **Focus:** Maritime security, anti-piracy, search and rescue (SAR), and naval interoperability.
- **Significance:** A long-standing U.S.-Ukraine naval exercise, enhancing

Black Sea security cooperation.

Saber Guardian/Rapid Reaction 2010

- **Date:** Conducted in multiple phases (summer/fall)
- **Location:** Ukraine and other Eastern European countries
- **Participants:** Ukrainian forces alongside U.S. Army Europe (USAREUR) and NATO partners.
- **Focus:** Rapid deployment, peace support operations, and joint command post exercises.



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